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37

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 202

Revised draft of  
9 August 1949

SUBJECT: Review of CIA Estimate ORE 60-48: Threats to the  
Security of the United States (Published 28 September 1948).

1. The threats to US security and the possibility of direct Soviet military action against the West have been under continuing review during the last few years. In ORE 60-48, dated 13 September 1948, entitled "Threats to the Security of the United States," it was estimated that within the next decade the USSR was unlikely deliberately to resort to war to gain its ends unless it considered that it was in imminent danger of attack by the Western Powers. In ORE 46-49, dated 21 April 1949, entitled "Possibility of Direct Military Action during 1949," it was estimated that a deliberate Soviet resort to military action against the West in 1949 was improbable. It was pointed out in the latter study, however, that international tension had increased during 1948 and that it would probably increase further during 1949. In these circumstances it was estimated that the danger of an unintended outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation on either side must be considered to have increased.

Note: This memorandum is in process of coordination with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐  
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2. The analysis of the threats to US security as developed in ORE 60-48 remains generally valid. It may be noted, however, that the rapid progress of the Chinese Communists and the present open alignment of Mao Tse-Tung, the Chinese Communist leader, with the USSR, has facilitated the further expansion of Soviet influence in the Far East and markedly strengthened the strategic position of the Soviet armed forces in the event of a global war.

3. The basic reasoning supporting the estimate in ORE 60-48 that the USSR was unlikely within the next decade to resort to war to gain its ends unless it considered that it was in imminent danger of attack by the Western Powers likewise remains generally valid. However, it should be pointed out that any estimate covering a ten-year period must be subject to continuing review: unpredictable changes in military capabilities, in national attitudes and policies and in the distribution of world power could undermine its validity. In any case, the fundamental hostility of the Soviet Government towards the United States and the formidable military power of the USSR requires, in common prudence, that the United States be prepared for the possibility of war with the USSR.

4. Developments since publication of ORE 46-49 lend further confirmation to the estimate that Soviet resort to direct military action in 1949 is improbable and, in addition, point to a reduction in the danger of an unintended outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation on either side. The most significant of these developments may be noted as follows:

- 2 -

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a. The USSR accepted the signing of the Atlantic Pact without the threatening moves against Finland, Scandinavia, Yugoslavia, and Iran, which were considered possible.

b. International tension was reduced by the Soviet proposal to lift the Berlin Blockade in consideration of a reconvening of the Council of Foreign Ministers. The USSR has likewise indicated a desire to increase East-West trade and to continue discussions on a Four-Power basis in further meetings of the CFM.

c. The increasing evidences of nationalist "deviationism" and economic difficulties in the satellite states bring into sharp relief the basic weaknesses in the political and economic position of the USSR and the need for a protracted period of peace in order to consolidate its position within its own sphere and develop its economic potential.

d. The rapid rise of a strong Communist State in China offers the USSR, on the one hand, the opportunity of quickly expanding its influence in Asia by means short of war and, on the other, confronts it with the delicate problem of attempting to keep the new Communist regime within the framework of an international dictatorship directed from Moscow. A deliberate resort to military action to attain its objectives in Western Europe might adversely affect these favorable prospects of attaining Soviet objectives in the Far East by peaceful means.

e. The development of the economic recession in the US and the dollar crisis in the UK appears to have confirmed the USSR in its belief that a

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general economic crisis in the capitalist world is at hand. Under these circumstances the USSR undoubtedly anticipates that US support of Western Europe will be substantially weakened, that Western unity will be disrupted by conflicting economic interests and that, as a result, opportunities will open up for the attainment of Soviet objectives without resort to military action.

5. It is considered, therefore, that the danger of war as a result of deliberate Soviet military action or of miscalculation on the part of either side will be less during the next year or two than at any time in recent years, provided the relative power potential of the USSR and the Western Powers is not altered significantly. However, if economic conditions deteriorate, particularly in Japan or Germany, it is possible that Communist exploitation of these difficulties might create local disturbances that would increase the internal security problem of US occupation forces.

- 4 -

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